V. Conservation

Commission Recommendations: In its report, *A Time to Act*, the Commission recommended that the NRCS and other appropriate agencies conduct local educational seminars for small and traditionally underserved farmers and ranchers to explain agency programs, including the environmental and economic benefits derived from the programs.

The Commission also recommended that farm policy should reward responsible stewardship and care of natural resources including the land, water, and air.

AGENCY HIGHLIGHTS

Cooperative Research, Education, and Extension Service (CRSEES)

■ **Diverse Small Producers Benefit from the USDA/CSREES SARE Program:** Through a nationwide grants program, the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program works to advance a more profitable, environmentally sound agriculture that is good for communities. Since the National Commission on Small Farms report, SARE has awarded dozens of grants that focus research and education efforts on achieving those goals for small farmers. Here are just a few:

- To improve the quality of life of small farmers throughout Kentucky, SARE funded an ongoing series of educational events at Kentucky State University (KSU). Reliant upon agricultural demonstrations, the "Third Thursday" events have introduced thousands of Kentuckians to profit-making, sustainable farming techniques. Over 6 years, KSU's Marion Simon and others brought about 2,500 people through the university's research farm, up to 400 per field day, to see demonstrations of aquaculture, apiary production, organic fruit and vegetable production, sustainable forestry, grain storage, goat production, warm-season grass demonstrations, and composting, among other topics. The success of the Third Thursday program has spawned a sister effort at Tennessee State University known as the Third Tuesday training program.

- Once a week, members of the Pembroke Farmers Cooperative in central Illinois bring their vegetables and sustainably raised meat in a refrigerated truck to the Austin farmers market in Chicago, 70 miles away. The young cooperative, started in 1999, has grown from a few members to more than 20, all eager to maximize the market potential for their chemical-free vegetables. Many members also raise chickens using range methods that justify their "natural" labeling claims. Range chicken production has increased partly thanks to two SARE farmer grants, which helped Pembroke producers perfect free-range and pen

methods for raising poultry. With little money – even buying seeds at the beginning of the season was challenging – farmers in Pembroke saw the advantage of pooling their limited resources. When two received SARE grants to study raising chickens outdoors, they shared their new practical experiences with others in the community.

- Residents of the Rosebud Lakota Reservation in south central South Dakota, facing more hurdles than most growers, have embraced family gardening. With help from three SARE grants, many beginning Rosebud gardeners not only grow enough food for their families and neighbors, but also supply a budding gardeners' market in a rural area devoid of many healthy food choices. With the first two grants, community leaders helped spread knowledge about gardening and beekeeping through informal get-togethers. The harvest from several families' table-sized garden plots, developed with help from SARE-funded program assistants from within the community, was bountiful enough to share with neighbors in reservation housing clusters.

  To spread the gardeners' success to the rest of the community, community leaders received a third SARE grant to organize the gardeners' market at the reservation's traffic light, the only fresh market for hundreds of miles. Eight vendors served the market in 2003, earning a $10,000 profit.

- Several SARE publications produced from 2002-2004 add to the sustainable agriculture information available to help the Nation's small farmers. These include: Meeting the Diverse Needs of Limited-Resource Producers: An Educator's Guide (2002); "Estrategias Economico-Ambientales en la Crianza de Cerdos" (Profitable Pork: Alternative Strategies for Hog Producers, 2004), the sister companion publication in Spanish to the English version produced in 2001; Profitable Poultry: Raising Birds on Pasture (2002); and Reap New Profits: Marketing Strategies for Farmers and Ranchers (2003).

Farm Service Agency

In response to the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act 2002 (2002 Farm Bill), FSA prepared two programmatic environmental impact statements (EIS) to evaluate potential environmental impacts from the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) as required by the National Environmental Policy Act. Part of the EIS process included a series of six public meetings across the country to solicit input concerning CRP and ECP from other Federal, State, and local agencies, as well as from FSA customers. The scoping meetings and other outreach efforts, including Federal Register and national newspaper notices, a toll-free telephone number, and e-mail account allowed FSA to explain proposed CRP changes and educate producers about the program.

As part of the CRP EIS, the FSA staff analyzed the possible levels of participation by limited-resource and small family farms in CRP (see Appendix 4, Figure 2).

- Conservation and Environmental Programs Division (CEPD) is striving to continue to provide useful and timely information to producers. One example is the new environmental and cultural resources Web site, which provides easy access by farmers to environmental documents, laws, and fact sheets.

- **Mississippi:** In January 2003, FSA donated a 400 acres inventory farm located in Hinds County, Mississippi, to the National Park Service. The donation was motivated by the number of significant historic resources on the property associated with the Vicksburg Campaign of the Civil War.

The signing ceremony was attended by numerous dignitaries including the National Park Service Director, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Administration, FSA Administrator, Mississippi State Executive Director, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Chairman, Natchez Trace Parkway and Vicksburg National Military Park Superintendents, and the mayor of Raymond, Mississippi. In addition, many local citizens attended the ceremony and learned about the tourism opportunities that expanding the Park will create for the local rural community.

- **South Carolina:** FSA worked with Mr. Richard Crump of Satterwhite Farms, Newberry County, South Carolina, to install buffers on his farms. Mr. Crump is the owner of a purebred Angus beef cattle farm and is the County Office Committee's (COC) minority advisor in Newberry County. He had a continuous CRP riparian buffer installed, as well as, a well through the FSA ECP program. He is thrilled with the conservation programs. He stated during a recent tour of his farm that having a quality supply of water has provided health benefits for his cattle. Animal health improvement is an issue that FSA can use to promote continuous CRP.

Natural Conservation Resources Service (NRCS)

ALABAMA

- With mapping assistance from NRCS, the Echota Cherokee Tribe developed interpretive trails, a museum and cultural center, an outdoor education center, an amphitheater, and a replica of a 17th Century Cherokee village on a 50-acre site in Cullman County. Native and herbal plants along the trail illustrate Indian medicine lore and teach students how to protect stream banks, reduce erosion, and provide wildlife habitat.

- NRCS and the Lowndes County Soil and Water Conservation District helped the owner of a small cattle farm in Haynesville make his operation more productive and profitable. Pasture was divided into 2, 20-acre sections to help control overgrazing and spread renovation costs out over a 2-year period. The landowner received cost shares to pay for the renovation. Through these efforts, the landowner now has better pastureland that helps produce higher profits and plans to maintain productivity by good grazing management.

- The NRCS Andalusia Field Office helped a Covington County landowner increase water quality and quantity on a long-neglected cattle operation. NRCS and the landowner developed a 5-year conservation plan that is now boosting water supplies, preventing erosion of stream banks

at cattle crossings, and keeping animal waste out of his stream. "What we did, we needed to do," the landowner said of the project. "I'm so glad to have the cows out of the stream. We have a better water supply for the cattle, and we have taken care of the erosion problems."

HAWAII

■ Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, NRCS developed a conservation plan and installed conservation practices that prevent gullies from developing on a 50-acre banana farm in Lahaina. The project also prevents sediment from entering nearby waterways.

KANSAS

■ NRCS officials, the Potawatomi Tribe, and Kansas State University designed and installed a drip irrigation system for fruit orchards on Potawatomi reservation land. This low-volume irrigation system allows regular watering of grapes, raspberries, blackberries, apples, and cherries. It also reduces production time and labor, resulting in more productive and cost-effective enterprises.

MONTANA

■ In March 2003, five NRCS plant materials centers (PMC) in the agency's Northern Plains and Midwest regions began tests of sweetgrass, a plant culturally significant to American Indian Tribes that may help landowners prevent erosion in northern climates. Sweetgrass is being tested for its ability to survive in northern climates, as well as its vigor and leaf length. It can produce up to 4,000 pounds of dried leaves per acre. Sweetgrass is used in religious and spiritual ceremonies by American Indian Tribes and for basket weaving, aspects of the plant that the PMC in Bridger, Montana, will use in the bicentennial celebrations of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

NEW MEXICO

■ Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and planning by Federal and State agencies, the Acoma Indian Tribe, land managers, and land users, the 520,000-acre Acoma Indian Reservation in northwest New Mexico boasted knee-high grass during 2003's drought.

EQIP made it possible to plan for the long term through funding for implementing solar-powered water pumps, fiberglass troughs and storages, pump jacks, pipelines, and intensive grazing management. This project has created better working relationships, enhanced cultural awareness and sensitivity, and increased understanding between Federal, State, and Tribal agencies.

■ NRCS and owners of a family farm in Lyden save irrigation water and increase apple and peach production through EQIP. An inefficient irrigation system that had the potential of contaminating ground water along the Rio Grande River was replaced with sprinklers. The new system has improved irrigation efficiency by 50 percent. Orchard trees were planted every 6 feet in rows spaced 12 feet apart. These measures are expected to help the orchard reach its full potential in 3 years, with production of 1,000 bushels of apples and 800 bushels of peaches per acre.

NORTH DAKOTA

In December 2002, North Dakota's Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Tribes planned and designed a 1,000-mile municipal, rural, and industrial water system, with assistance from NRCS. The agency provided technical and financial assistance for design and installation of livestock pipelines. The project, set for completion in 2012, will protect more than 300,000 acres of grazing land from overgrazing.

TEXAS

NRCS officials designed a plan through the Wetlands Reserve Program to convert a 20-acre section of a family-owned dairy farm in Hopkins County to wetlands. Once complete, NRCS and the owner expect the project to attract birds and water fowl. The owner, a longtime advocate for family farmers, will open the area to the public. He considers the project to be a tribute to his family and friends.

WASHINGTON

NRCS, and a consortium of Tribes in Washington State, struck a compromise between farms and fish. A Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) project to be undertaken by the Tribes will replace tide gates that prevent salt water and salmon from entering a channel used as a water source by a farmer in La Conner. The 100-year-old gates will be replaced with gates that allow some salt water and salmon into the freshwater channel. The Tribes hope to create 5 miles of salmon habitat. Sixty percent of the $285,000 needed for the project will come through WRP.